Brahmacharya

By Swami Brahmananda

From Chapter 11 of SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA TRANSLATED FROM CONVERSATIONS AND LETTERS IN BENGALI

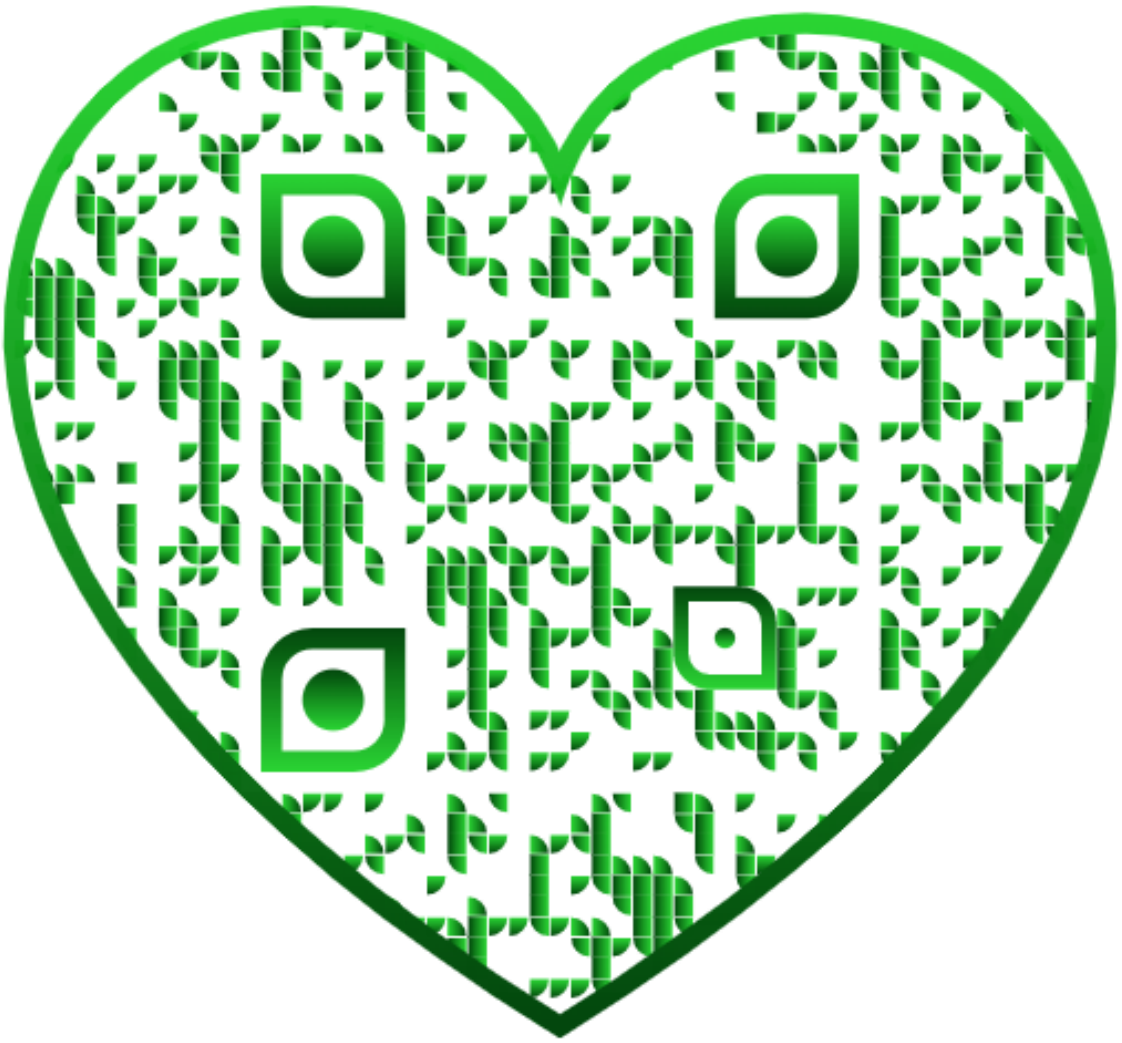
Necessity of Brahmacharya

Without strict Brahmacharya it is not possible for any one to hold fast to great ideals. To secure the full development and vitality of the body, brain and mind, Brahmacharya is essential. Those who observe strict Brahmacharya develop a strong memory and a remarkable capacity for understanding. By means of Brahmacharya, a special nerve is developed which brings about these wonderful powers.

Do you know why our great teachers have laid so much emphasis upon Brahmacharya? It is because they knew that if a man fail in this respect, everything is lost. The strict Brahmacharin does not lose his vitality. He may not look like a Palwan (a great athlete) but the development of his brain is so fine that his capacity for grasping supersensuous things is remarkable. There are certain rules which a Brahmacharin must observe. He must avoid exciting food,oversleep,over-exercise,laziness,bad company and evil conversation. If you indulge in idle talk your brain gets excited, you cannot control your thoughts, and you suffer from sleeplessness and other troubles.

Diet and Meditation

The control of the appetite is essential. Otherwise you will be subject to many troubles. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “Keep your Bhudi (stomach) and Mudi (brain) cool.” It means you can do effective work only if your head and stomach remain calm and cool. The glutton who has no control over his appetite brings ruin on his body and mind. Eating too much of such foods as garlic, onion, or chilli, excites the system, and one finds it extremely hard to control the mind. I believe that those who want to lead a spiritual life should pay special attention to what they eat and drink. It is desirable to take only nutritious and easily digested food. There is no good in overloading the stomach. No hard and fast rule can be laid down regarding diet. With some, fish and meat might agree very well, while to others they may do harm. Every individual must find out from his own experience the food that agrees with him. We should eat only in order that our body may remain fit and that we may be able to realize our true nature. The Sastras declare : Health is the vital factor in spiritual practice. This does not mean that one should think of his body day and night. It means that one should see that the vitality of the body remains unimpaired. One should eat healthy food, avoiding that which excites or produces lethargy. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “You may eat as much as you like during the day, but you must eat only sparingly at night”. The idea is that if you take only a little food at night, your body will remain light and you can easily concentrate your



mind. Otherwise you will have a tendency to sleep or be lazy. Would you sleep away the night or spend it in meditation? Daytime has many distractions and hence is unsuited for meditation, but at night all creatures go to rest and nature herself is calm and silent. This is the time for aspirants to meditate on the Lord. In the depth of the night the mind is easily concentrated.

Brahmacharya and Meditation

Spiritual practices should not be done in public or for show. If you do them before others, they will be harmful to you. People will mock at you, they will offer you advice gratis and give you conflicting suggestions, as a result of which various doubts will arise in your mind and your spiritual progress will be obstructed. The ideal Sadhaka behaves thus, he goes to bed at night with the mosquito curtain drawn down; everybody thinks that he is sleeping, but as a matter of fact he spends the whole night in meditation lying quietly on his bed. While you are young, you must try hard to get a taste of Divine Bliss. When once you have got this taste, you can never forsake your Sadhana. Even at the risk of your life, you will continue your spiritual practices. Those who are troubled with too much sleep in the night will do well to sleep during the day, with a view to devote the night to meditation. The best time for meditation is dawn, eventide and midnight. Too often people waste this time in useless ways. Sri Ramakrishna never used to spend the night in sleep, nor would he allow the young devotees who stayed with him to sleep long. When others had gone to bed, he would wake up his disciples, give them definite instructions and send them to the Panchavati, or the Mother's Temple, or Shiva's Temple for meditation. They would spend the whole night in Sadhana as directed, and take rest during the day. It was in this way that Sri Ramakrishna used to take them through various spiritual exercises. Often he used to say, "Three classes of people keep awake in the night, Yogis, Bhogis (seekers of enjoyment) and Rogis (sick persons). You are all Yogis. You should by no means sleep away the night."